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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the future of peripatetic services supporting children with special educational needs in integrated settings in England and Wales, particularly the extent to which such services will continue to be centrally funded by local education agencies (LEAs) under the 1988 Education Reform Act. A survey conducted on 114 LEAs in England and Wales (55 returned completed questionnaires) gathered data on the scope and organization of support services, the role and function of support services, the response to budget reductions, staff training and support, multidisciplinary consultations, support for non-statemented children with special needs, and support for newly integrated children. It is concluded that LEAs wish to retain support services as a central resource, available to all schools and able not only to assist existing integrated children with special education needs but also able to respond to any increase or change in demand. LEAs felt that the maintenance and development of these services would be seriously jeopardized if they were forced to devolve an increased proportion of their General Schools Budget to individual schools, as called for in recently implemented educational policy. (JDD)

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S.E.N.N.A.C. Survey

L.E.A. SUPPORT SERVICES FOR MEETING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Malcolm Garner, Ian Petrie, David Pointon

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This survey was conducted in response to considerable concern expressed by members of the Special Educational Needs National Advisory Council regarding the effects upon S.E.N. support services of proposals for delegation of central funding under L.M.S.

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LEA SUPPORT SERVICES FOR MEETING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: A SURVEY.

Malcolm Garner, Ian Petrie and David Pointon.

INTRODUCTION.

Local management of schools(L.M.S.) was one of the key elements in the 1988 Education Reform Act. L.M.S. is intended to increase efficiency and to reflect the underlying management principle that spending decisions are best taken by those who are closest to the users of the service. With the operation of LMS each LEA has had to devise a formula by which it delegates the bulk of The General Schools Budget(GSB), that is its total budget, to all secondary schools and to those primary schools with more than 200 pupils. In due course such financial control may also be delegated to smaller primary schools and special schools.
The GSB includes direct spending on each school and the cost of administration plus the centrally controlled services to schools. Within the GSB excepted items are those that are retained under LEA control. Some excepted items are mandatory and these include capital expenditure, the cost of central administration and inspectors/advisers. Discretionary exceptions are those that can be excepted from delegation to schools, if LEAs so choose, and these include the funding for statemented pupils, educational psychologists, peripatetic teachers and educational welfare officers. The total cost of discretionary exceptions should not exceed 10% of the LEA's General School Budget. In addition,after an initial three year period, the Secretary of State will expect LEAs to aim for a target of reducing the total cost of their discretionary items to 7% of their General Schools Budget.
Taking full account of the needs of less academic children, especially those with special educational needs, could be a daunting challenge under LMS. For example LEAs may find it difficult to ensure that any sums they delegate for meeting special educational needs are, in fact, used for that purpose by schools.
Another major anxiety, and one which has been widely voiced among the constituent associations of the Special Educational Needs Advisory Council (SENNAC), relates to the future of peripatetic services supporting children with special educational needs in integrated settings, particularly the extent to which such services will continue to be centrally funded by LEAs. The degree to which this concern about support services is justified, however, is difficult to judge because information is lacking both about the present position and the plans that LEAs may have for the future. In an attempt to make good this lack of information SENNAC decided to sponsor a survey giving LEAs an opportunity to state briefly their current views and future intentions in respect of their support services.

THE SURVEY.

A questionnaire concerning LEA peripatetic support services for meeting special educational needs was circulated in April 1990 to all mainland local education authorities in England and Wales(N=114). After being asked to specify those groups of children with special educational needs who were being helped by their own support services respondents were invited, through open ended questions, to consider a number of issues. These included: present functions and roles of peripatetic staff;the prospect for peripatetic support services following any reduction in LEA funding;support and training for peripatetic teachers; multidisciplinary consultations; identifying and supporting children with special educational needs in mainstream schools; and support for those children moving from special schools to mainstream placements. Completed questionnaires were received from 55 LEAs giving a response rate of 48% Of these returns 24 (44%) were from county LEAs and 31 (55%) from metropolitan and London LEAs. In the event, however, the expressed views of county and metropolitan authorities could not be differentiated. Reminders were not sent to non-responding authorities and, in view of the very heavy demands currently being made on senior LEA officers in the aftermath of the Education Reform Act, this rate of return may be considered satisfactory. Thirty four of the questionnaires were completed by assistant education officers; twelve by inspectors or advisers; four by heads of support services; three by principal educational psychologists and two by professional assistants.

SCOPE AND ORGANISATION OF SUPPORT SERVICES.

All the LEAs in the sample provide a support service for children with hearing impairment and visual handicaps. Support services for children with learning difficulties are provided by 52 authorities (96%) in the sample and the number of services for children with emotional and behavioural disorders is 39 (71%). Support services for a variety of other special needs are less widespread - for example only two authorities have such a service for travellers' children. Support services, however, are established for children with physical disabilities in 13 authorities (24%);children with specific learning difficulties in 9 authorities (16%); children with language and communication disorders in 6 authorities(11%); and pre-school children with special educational needs in 6 authorities(11%). Of course these data give no indication of the quality of the services which may well differ very considerably both between LEAs and between the different services.There is , for example, some anecdotal evidence which suggests that the longer established support services for the sensory impaired are perceived to be more effective than the more recently established support services for the emotionally and behaviourally disordered.
Whilst all the support services for the sensory impaired in the sample LEAs are organized centrally on an authority wide basis there is considerable variation in the organization of the support for other groups with special educational needs. However

where changes in the organization of support for children with learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties were reported by LEAs they were mainly in the direction of basing such services on area centres or special schools.

ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SUPPORT SERVICES.

Questionnaire responses indicated that the support services carry out a wide range of tasks. One metropolitan authority's general approach was described as: (a) individual pupil support for both statemented and non-statemented pupils, and (b) support to teachers and schools to reflect the needs expressed in School Development Plans. Most LEAs appear to operate within this broad framework of providing support for both children and teachers. Specific roles mentioned included: liaison with teachers, parents and staff of other agencies; teaching individual children; preparing educational advice; curriculum and whole school support; ensuring access to the National Curriculum; and, most frequently, assessment and in-service training.
Twenty four (44%) of the respondents indicated that no change of role for their support service was proposed while four authorities (7%) intend making changes.The remainder gave no indication of their intentions.

RESPONDING TO BUDGET REDUCTIONS.

Authorities were asked what, with the proposed reduction in centrally held funding, was their policy regarding the continued provision of centrally based and funded services for supporting pupils with special educational needs.
Responses can be summarised as follows:
(a) Intending to retain services centrally, funded as "discretionary exceptions" - 41 authorities (75%) ;
(b) Hoping to be able to retain services centrally, funded as "discretionary exceptions"- 3 authorities (5%);
(c) Reorganising in order to retain some services centrally and delegate funding for others to schools - 4 authorities (7%);
(d) Investigating the possibility of decentralising and delegating services to schools - 2 authorities (4%);
(e) Don't know at present - 5 authorities (9%).
It is evident that, despite the financial pressures upon authorities, the great majority are either intending or hoping to retain support services as a centrally funded network able to respond to needs when and where they arise.
Authorities were also asked if the suggested target for further reducing centrally held funds from 10% to 7% would cause them difficulties in maintaining this provision. Responses to this question may be summarised as follows:
(a) Yes it will definitely cause difficulties - 19 authorities (35%);
(b) It may well cause difficulties - 16 authorities (29%);
(c) We do not know at present - 11 authorities (20%); (d) We do not expect it to cause difficulties-9 authorities (16%).

It may be seen from these statistics that only a sixth of the responding authorities were confident that any further reduction in centrally held funding would not threaten the continued existence of S.E.N. support services.
Several respondents, including some in (c) above commented that any such reduction would be very likely to jeopardise the quality of service offered and also mean that desirable improvements would become more difficult to implement.

STAFF TRAINING AND SUPPORT.

Authorities were asked about arrangements for supporting and training staff in their peripatetic services and whether they have a specific INSET allocation for this purpose.
The majority of the respondents (76%) do make a specific allocation of funds from the INSET budget; half of the remainder finance INSET through the advisory and inspectorate services;and the rest make their own unspecified arrangements. Patterns of support and training for staff are diverse but the most common are "in-house" arrangements, coordinated and delivered by the psychological services, heads of service, advisory service etc. Those described include a two-day induction course, regular meetings, and attendance at national courses. Several respondents indicated that regular INSET was available but supplied no further details.
Something in the order of one third of the sample did not give any details of the training opportunities and support that were available for their SEN support staff.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONSULTATIONS.

Authorities were asked to indicate how they were implementing Circular 22/89 with particular reference to multidisciplinary consultation and services for children with special educational needs.
A number of respondents indicated that this was not a question they found easy to answer because as one said "policy has yet to be formulated", or another, "discussions regarding this are still on-going."
Most commented, however, that they did not envisage much change to existing practice. Typical responses were that the recommendations "are largely in accordance with present practice"; that "we already have multidisciplinary consultations where appropriate"; or that "the authority has always used this format of consultation in determining the overall needs of pupils."
Of those that did mention developments in this area one LEA had recently appointed "a statements officer/teacher adviser to consult and negotiate with all professionals, parents and services over needs and provision who would also organize some INSET." Another authority outlined plans "to form multidisciplinary groups with the educational psychologists / education social workers and unified teaching support."

There was thus a mixed response to this question but it would seem at this stage that most authorities do not consider the circular will result in major changes to existing practice.

SUPPORTING NON-STATEMENTED CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.

Authorities were asked how they identified and then supported children in mainstream schools who had special educational needs but were not the subject of a statement.Once again a variety of approaches was reported. The identification of these children is predictably seen by almost all as mainly the responsibility of the schools themselves. Some mentioned the S.E.N. coordinators as having this function, others the headteacher while one said that it was a recommendation of the authority that each school should have a school assessment and monitoring team to undertake this task. Another said, with one suspects evidence of first hand experience, that " this is achieved through early morning meetings"!
Four authorities mentioned that they supplement school based referrals with the results of screening tests. These were generally administered at primary level only but one authority used such tests at 5, 7, 9 and 13 years (shades of N/C assessment!). One of the four explained that a specific SEN element in the formula funded budget was calculated for each school on the basis of the language screening. Others, as is well known, are using free school meals as their guideline for additional funding.
The support offered to these pupils again varied but nearly all authorities mentioned the use of a peripatetic service to supplement the schools' own resources and some mentioned the role of the educational psychologist in providing advice (despite the absence of a statement) One authority which relied more on the schools' own staff added that all schools had an element of funding for SEN in their budgets while another stated that those children without statements sometimes benefited "from access to support assistants allocated to schools because of the presence of a statemented pupil." Details of the organisation and size of an authority's support service were not asked for but comments showed that most were centrally funded and able, therefore, to respond to needs as and where they arose. One respondent mentioned the use of outreach teachers from special schools.
The type of support offered to schools was not discussed at length. It is clear from a number of additional comments, however, that there has been a move away from withdrawal of individual SEN pupils and that most of the work is now done with small groups or by offering whole-class support accompanied by advice and guidance to teachers.
One respondent predicted that "under LMS the importance of statements is likely to increase as a means of identifying and targeting resources."

SUPPORTING NEWLY INTEGRATED CHILDREN.

In most LEAs the support services seem to have sole responsibility for facilitating the movement of children from specialist (segregated) facilities to mainstream schools. There is, however, a great deal of variation in the extent to which support is given. In a few cases only minimum support seems to be available. For example one response was: "We have no formalised procedures for providing/ensuring support in these situations, but the appropriate members of this service are normally informed of such transfers." In most authorities, however, a clearer policy exists.For example:" Support services have an important contribution in this respect and a role that will be developed further in the future."
In eight LEAs(14%) those children moving from special to mainstream schools are also supported by staff from special schools, and this is particularly the case immediately following transfer.
In three authorities(5%) the responses indicate that special schools have sole responsibility for providing support for children who have been transferred from special to mainstream schools.

CONCLUSIONS.

It may be seen that, although there are some variations in practice, most LEAs have adopted the model of one or more centrally based support services for certain groups of pupils with special educational needs. Presumably they have done so because they have found this to be the most effective, practical and economic means of providing specialist help for those children who are integrated into mainstream schools and for their teachers. Some services, particularly those dealing with sensory impairments, are also closely involved in working with pre-school children and their families.
This survey seems to indicate that, given the choice , LEAs would wish to retain support services as a central resource, available to all schools and able not only to assist existing integrated children with SEN but also able to respond to any increase or change in demand. The fear expressed by most is that if they are forced to devolve an increased proportion of their G.S.B. to individual schools this will seriously jeopardise their ability to maintain, let alone devolop, their present support services. There is real concern that, having developed sound integration practice based on the recommendations of the Warnock Report and the subsequent 1981 Education Act, the process which has benefitted so many children may now be undermined by the effects of L.M.S.
It is ackowledged that it is most unlikely that this damaging outcome was either foreseen or intended when the legislation was being drafted. If this is the case, how can such a situation now be avoided?
There would seem to be two possible solutions.

Either (i) support services should be made mandatory rather than discretionary exceptions under L.M.S.;

or (ii) proposals to reduce the proportion of G.S.B. held centrally should not be implemented.

Most LEAs indicated that they could maintain services whilst remaining within a 10% figure yet few were confident they could do so if the target of 7% were enforced.
It is to be hoped that the results of this survey will highlight the urgent need for a solution to be found. Responses to this survey indicate that LEAs clearly recognise the vital role of LEA centrally funded peripatetic services in supporting pupils with special educational needs. They also indicate however that, under current L.M.S. proposals, their continued existence remains problematic.

S.E.N.N.A.C.

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The Council consists of representatives from each of the following organisations:

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